

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-08

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 37679

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR PINT ECON EFIN FR
SUBJECT: CONVERSATION WITH PRIME MINISTER RAYMOND BARRE

1. PRIME MINISTER RAYMOND BARRE AND I HAD LUNCH TO-
GETHER PRIVATELY DECEMBER 20. HIS OVERVIEW OF SEVERAL
POLICY AREAS IS SUMMARIZED BELOW.

2. FRENCH FOREIGN POLICY

BARRE EMPHASIZED THE IMPORTANCE OF FRANCE'S REMAIN-
ING INDEPENDENT IN ITS ABILITY TO SELECT ITS OWN COURSES
OF ACTION. BARRE TOLD ME THAT THERE IS BOTH A EUROPEAN
AND A WORLDWIDE DIMENSION TO THIS POLICY. IN EUROPE,
THE PROBLEM IS THE GENERAL FEAR OF GERMAN DOMINATION,
WHICH IS DESTABILIZING AND UNACCEPTABLE. THE SOVIETS
COULD NOT ACCEPT IT, AND THE OTHER EUROPEANS FEAR IT.
FRANCE MUST REMAIN AT LEAST EQUAL TO GERMANY IN ORDER TO
AVOID GERMAN DOMINATION OR, EVEN WORSE, SOVIET DOMINA-
TION. THIS REQUIRES AN ECONOMICALLY STRONG FRANCE,
WHICH IS THE OBJECT OF HIS CURRENT FIGHT AGAINST IN-
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FLATION, AND A FRANCE THAT CAN DEAL INDEPENDENTLY WITH
THE SOVIET UNION. IN SHORT, EUROPE'S PARTNERS MUST HAVE
AN ALTERNATE FOCUS IN EUROPE BESIDES THE FRG, AND THAT
CAN ONLY BE FRANCE. IN ITS WORLDWIDE DIMENSION, FRENCH
INDEPENDENCE IS NEEDED TO AVOID GREAT-POWER DOMINATION,
AN UNHEALTHY SITUATION WHICH CAN LEAD TO DISASTERS SUCH

AS VIETNAM. FRENCH INDEPENDENCE PROMOTES GREAT-POWER CONSULTATIONS WITH LESSER POWERS, WHICH ASSURES THE EXPOSURE OF DIFFERENT POINTS OF VIEW ON KEY ISSUES. NEVERTHELESS FRANCE REMAINS COMMITTED TO THE WEST AND THE ALLIANCE, AS DEMONSTRATED BY DEGAULLE'S BEHAVIOR DURING THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS.

3. THE FRENCH ECONOMY

BARRE SAID THAT THE KEY TO FRENCH ECONOMIC RECOVERY IS THE FIGHT AGAINST INFLATION. AND THE KEY TO INFLATION IS THE FIGHT AGAINST EXCESSIVE WAGE RATES WHICH WILL PULL THE 1976 INFLATION RATE TO 12 PERCENT. FOR 1977, BARRE HAS HOPES OF BRINGING INFLATION DOWN BELOW 10 PERCENT, WHICH ALONG WITH AN ECONOMIC UPTURN IN THE UNITED STATES CAN BE EXPECTED TO BRING FRANCE OUT OF ITS SLUMP. HE EMPHASIZED THAT FRANCE'S ECONOMIC RECOVERY IS CLOSELY TIED TO AMERICAN DEVELOPMENTS.

4. FRENCH INTERNAL POLITICS

MY LUNCH WITH BARRE TOOK PLACE ONLY A FEW DAYS AFTER THE PUBLICATION OF SEVERAL OPINION POLLS WHICH WERE BAD NEWS FOR GISCARD AND THE GOVERNING COALITION. I ASKED BARRE FOR HIS VIEWS OF THESE NEGATIVE DEVELOPMENTS, AS WELL AS THE ACTIVITIES OF HIS PREDECESSOR JACQUES CHIRAC. BARRE SAID THAT BEYOND THE POLLS THE FRENCH VOTER IS RESPONSIBLE AND MODERATE. THE FRENCH VOTER WOULD NOT BE SO IRRESPONSIBLE AS TO ELECT THE COMMON PROGRAM. EVEN IF A PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION WERE HELD

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TODAY, GISCARD WOULD DEFEAT MITTERRAND, THE PRESIDENT'S LOW POPULARITY POLLS NOTWITHSTANDING. BARRE DID NOT FEEL THAT CHIRAC'S ACTIVITIES CONSTITUTE A NEGATIVE DEVELOPMENT. ON THE CONTRARY, CHIRAC IS NOT ONLY AMBITIOUS BUT ABLE AND AN ASSET TO GISCARD'S CAUSE, BARRE TOLD ME.

I TOLD BARRE THAT THE AMERICAN VIEW ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF THE LEFT'S COMING TO POWER IN FRANCE IS NO SECRET. WE THINK IT WOULD WEAKEN THE AMERICAN WILL TO SUPPORT EUROPE AND THAT IT WOULD MAKE FRANCE UNSTABLE. BARRE AGREED WITH ME COMPLETELY. HE SAID IT WOULD BE A DISASTER FOR FRANCE, AND HE QUESTIONED WHETHER EVEN THE SOVIETS WANTED TO SEE FRENCH COMMUNISTS IN POWER. IN THE CONTEXT OF SOVIET FEARS OF GERMAN DOMINATION OF EUROPE, THE RUSSIANS WANT A STRONG FRANCE THAT CAN COUNTERBALANCE THE GERMANS. THEY KNOW THE PRESENCE OF COMMUNISTS IN THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT WOULD WEAKEN FRANCE.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 PARIS 37679

LIMDIS

I EXPRESSED THE VIEW THAT ONE REASON FOR SOVIET ENTHUSIASM FOR DEGAULLE WAS HIS ABILITY TO DIMINISH US INFLUENCE IN EUROPE AS WELL AS GERMAN. BARRE AGREED, BUT FELT THAT THE SITUATION HAS NOT CHANGED SUFFICIENTLY FOR THE SOVIETS TO SEEK A LEFT GOVERNMENT IN FRANCE.

5. FRANCO-AMERICAN RELATIONS

BARRE TOLD ME THAT HE IS ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION AND IS ENCOURAGED BY HIS APPOINTMENTS. HE KNOWS VANCE AND BLUMENTHAL AND HAS HIGH OPINIONS OF BOTH. BARRE SAID HE BELIEVES THAT US POLICY IS TO REDUCE PROTECTIONISM. THE FIRST ITEM OF BUSINESS, HOWEVER, IS A SUMMIT OF THE FIVE MAJOR WESTERN ECONOMIC POWERS--THE US, FRANCE, GERMANY, THE UK AND JAPAN--TO DEMONSTRATE THE SAME TYPE OF COHESION ENJOYED BY OPEC AND THE SOVIET BLOC.

6. PRESIDENT GISCARD D'ESTAING'S IMAGE

I PROBED BARRE GENTLY ABOUT REPORTS THAT GISCARD

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WAS BECOMING DEPRESSED BY RECENT EVENTS AND THAT THE PRESIDENT HAD LOST HIS ENERGY AND DRIVE. BARRE DENIED THIS FOR TWO REASONS. FIRST, DEGAULLE GENERATED A TREMENDOUS RESPECT FOR THE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT AND ITS INCUMBENT. DESPITE THE POLLS, THERE IS A GREAT DEAL OF PUBLIC GOODWILL TOWARD THE PRESIDENT, WHO FEELS IT. SECONDLY, THE PRESIDENT HAS BOTH A POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC STRATEGY WHICH HE FEELS WILL WORK OVER THE MEDIUM TERM. IT IS NOT NECESSARY, THEREFORE, FOR THE PRESIDENT TO REACT TO EVERY SHORT-TERM SETBACK. THE PRESIDENT IS SERENELY EXPECTING HIS PLAN TO FALL INTO PLACE IN TIME FOR THE NEXT ELECTIONS. HIS PROPOSAL FOR AN ECONOMIC SUMMIT INVOLVING PRESIDENT CARTER IS PART OF THAT OVERALL PLAN.

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